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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASUNCION 001120

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y
(TO ADD AN ADDRESSEE AND A PASS LINE)

STATE FOR WHA/BSC AND EB/IFD/OIA
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR LAC/AA
STATE PASS TO USTR FOR LYANG
NSC FOR SUE CRONIN
TREASURY FOR OSIA MAUREEN WAFER
TREASURY FOR OTA WARFIELD, VAN KOCH, MILLAR
COMMERCE FOR ITA SARAH COOK
SOUTHCOM FOR POLAD DAN JOHNSON
DOD FOR USD/ISA-DAS PARDO MAUER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/31/2008
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [PINR](#) [PA](#)
SUBJECT: PARAGUAY: ENTRY OF CUBANS CONCERNS GOP

Classified By: POLOFF STERLING TILLEY, FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

Summary

[1](#)1. (U) News articles in recent weeks alleged an alarming number of Cuban nationals are entering Paraguay. Confidential sources have confirmed the legal entry of

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significant numbers of Cubans into Paraguay since May 2005. Carlos Liseras, Director of Immigration, discussed this issue with the ConGen but would not confirm details since the investigation is on-going. Embassy sources have noted that simultaneous investigations by intelligence and military organizations seek to determine if Cuban intelligence operatives are working in various parts of the country. The Ambassador discussed the entry of Cubans with a reporter who indicated the Cubans are using Paraguay as a "trampoline" to go to the US. Ironically, it seems the Cuban Government officials are also concerned; the Cuban Embassy in Paraguay has announced it was investigating the travel of Cubans to Paraguay and "how they got out of Cuba." The MFA's Bilateral Affairs Director confirmed the GOP plans to terminate the Cuban doctor program; he placed the number of Cuban doctors in the country at 70 and the number of Paraguayans on scholarship in Cuba at 651. Private individuals have informed Emboffs that a number of the Cuban doctors do not want to leave Paraguay. End Summary.

Immigration Chief Offers Little Information

[1](#)3. (C) On August 24, ConGen discussed the legal entry of Cubans in increasing numbers in recent months with Carlos Liseras, Director of Immigration. Liseras indicated Immigration along with the National Police are investigating the motives behind the increase in Cubans entering Paraguay. He indicated that the Immigration Office does not know the exact number of Cuban nationals in Paraguay. He also said that the Cubans have been entering legally with the proper documentation. Some Embassy sources have indicated that sixty (60) to seventy (70) Cubans per month have entered Paraguay since May 2005. Some public and military sources estimate that as many as 700 Cubans have entered Paraguay since May. Liseras indicated that once the investigation is complete he will discuss the issue again with ConGen.

Spies, Tourists, and Doctors, Oh My!

[1](#)4. (C) Embassy sources confirm there are simultaneous investigations underway, including by the Military, Immigration and the National Police, into the travel of Cubans to Paraguay. The military is addressing this situation from the perspective that some tourists and/or medical personnel may be GOC intelligence operatives. Immigration and the National Police are investigating the possibility that the Cubans are involved in international crime syndicates operating in Paraguay and or are planning to travel to third countries. Unconfirmed news reports have alleged that Cuban nationals have provided military training to leftist groups in the interior provinces.

Ninety (90) Miles Not Long Enough

[1](#)5. (U) Recently, the Ambassador discussed this issue with a journalist, who believes many Cubans are using Paraguay as a

means to earn enough dollars to enter the U.S. and then claim asylum. A recent news report alleges, a large number of Cubans entered Paraguay in Ciudad del Este and Encarnacion, then obtained falsified documents and entered the U.S. via Argentina and Brazil. Consular information indicates only three (3) Cuban nationals applied for NIVs and all were denied. The ConGen suspects the Cubans may be using coyotes to enter the U.S., if the story is true. ConGen will discuss this issue with the DHS Officer in Lima.

Cuban Government Concerned?

16. (U) News reports indicate that the Cuban Embassy in Asuncion is investigating not only the stay of its citizens here but also how they succeeded in leaving Cuba. One diplomatic source said that a normal Cuban citizen couldn't get access to enough money to buy an airplane ticket to leave Cuba. Cuba's Ambassador to Paraguay Gonzalez Cruz has asserted that Cuba is also interested in finding out more about its nationals entering Paraguay: namely who those people are, what they did for a living in Cuba, what itinerary they are using, whether they got their visa from the Paraguayan Embassy in Havana (headed by Augusto Ocampos Caballero), and whether they will remain in the country or are thinking of emigrating to a third country like the U.S. (NOTE: A related report claims, a Cuban mission plans to come in September with portable communications equipment to navigate through the Internet in connection with the medical work they will carry out in the country. End Note.) Other reports indicate Cuba's Ambassador to Paraguay will soon finish her mission.

Cuban Doctors and Paraguayan Scholarships

17. (C) On August 26, PolCouns met with the MFA's Director of Bilateral Affairs Amb. Ceferino Valdez to discuss the Cuban medical program. When apprised President Duarte had told SECDEF on August 16 that there were 700 Cuban medical doctors in Paraguay, Valdez noted that the President had erred. Seventy (70) Cuban medical doctors are registered in the country. It is possible the President was thinking of the number of Paraguayans studying in Cuba on medical scholarships, which Valdez placed at 651. (NOTE: Embassy sources have given us a list of 67 medical personnel).

18. (C) Valdez confirmed that President Duarte had decided not to renew the MOU with Cuba for the doctors program that expires at the end of the year. However, he advised that Paraguay has not/not officially informed Cuba of this decision yet, although it has been mentioned publicly by the Health Minister. He maintained the Cuban Embassy is calling "everyday" asking about extension of the MOU for the program, which is apparently in its fifth year. To date, Valdez was not aware of any requests for asylum or refugee status made either to Paraguay or the UN by the Cuban doctors. There were, however, several cases in which Cuban doctors had married Paraguayans and had children. The Paraguayan spouses had petitioned for the Cubans to obtain permanent residency in Paraguay but Valdez said that the GOC required the doctors to return to Cuba while the petitions remained pending. Valdez did not discount the possibility that once the decision regarding termination of the program was announced several of the doctors might claim refugee status to avoid returning.

19. (C) On September 1, Pierre Joly, the Belgian director of a medical relief NGO and Ivan Benavente, the Director of Institute that specializes in natural medicine discussed the Cuban doctor program with PolCouns. Both maintained that they had heard from GOP sources that Paraguay intended to end the Cuban medical program in response to U.S. pressure exerted in part during the recent visit of SECDEF Rumsfeld. Both had worked with Cuban doctors whom they claimed brought to Paraguay a knowledge of natural medicine few doctors from other parts of the world could share. Some of these Cuban specialists in natural medicine and a number of other Cuban doctors -- numbering 20 in total -- were worried about the imminent termination of the Cuban medical program. They wanted to stay in Paraguay but had been informed by Cuban C O R R E C T E D C O P Y authorities that they would be transferred to Venezuela where they understood "Cuban doctors had been killed." Joly and Benavente appealed for U.S. intervention with the GOP to grant these doctors permission to stay in Paraguay.

110. (C) Polcouns described U.S. concern in principle with the Cuban doctor program given accounts that its participants involved themselves in political indoctrination activities -- a concern Joly and Benavente said that they shared. The U.S. had shared its concerns regarding Cuba but Paraguay would have to take its own decision about the future of this program. Those fearing political persecution could consider

appealing for refugee status directly to Paraguay through the United Nations. Benavente believed that some Cuban doctors had stayed in Paraguay in the past upon completion of their tours. He was concerned Cuba might decide to cancel its scholarship program for Paraguayans should Paraguay decide to cancel the doctor program or allow a significant number of Cubans to claim refugee status in Paraguay. He conveyed interest, however, in exploring with UN representatives the possibility of pursuing refugee status.

11. (C) Comment: The entry of a significant number of Cubans, legal and otherwise, has captured the attention of immigration and law enforcement officials. Immigration is under pressure to better account for the whereabouts of those Cubans. The GOP appears prepared to address concerns regarding the activities of the Cuban doctors in country by terminating the program at years' end. While the MFA advised us the number of doctors was limited to 70; the Japanese Ambassador told us that he had been informed by the Cuban Ambassador that there were approximately 200 Cuban doctors in country. Post will remain in contact with GOP regarding their investigation into this matter and efforts to address the issue. Our quiet efforts have helped stir debate both about possible improper activities by Cuban doctors and others, and lack of adequate data on other Cubans possibly entering to escape Castro. Ironically, the Cuban Ambassador's statements noting concern over how so many Cubans "got out of Cuba" strengthens our message. End Comment.
KEANE